

MAY 10, 1992

WITNESSING IN SUFFERING

Does the world really care what you THINK? Probably not! Does anyone care what you DO? Probably so! Most of us think that abortion is wrong and no one really cares that we think that. A couple of weeks ago a group of people who think that abortion is wrong stage a protest march at an abortion clinic in Buffalo, NY and, based on the press coverage, it seemed that many people cared what they did. Some of the ones that took action against abortion were arrested. I have not heard of anyone getting into problems on the job for believing that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died to save us from our sins, and that He is Lord of our lives; however, I do know of some that have had problems because they discussed this believe with fellow workers. The parent that deplores the obscene language in "required reading" for their teenaged children get along very well with the school authorities until they take action to get the required reading material changed. If we, as Christians, are not doing anything to change the world around us, then no one cares what you believe. If, on the other hand, we are changing the society for the sake of the Kingdom of God, then those that are not in that Kingdom will care and will oppose what is done.

Suffering for the cause of Christ is a reality in many parts of the world and is becoming more real in our society. We see what the news media does to people who oppose abortion and pornography. They are painted as some wild eyed fanatic rather than a concerned person that is trying to preserve that which is of value.

I PETER 3:13-17 In general, taking positive action to show Christian love for those in need will not bring harm to us. However, when the social order becomes so perverted that "good is bad and bad is good," then we have a real possibility of suffer for righteousness sake. We can see a growing tendency of opposition to Christianity in our society and there are cases where the so called "freedom of choice" and "freedom of expression" issues carry more weight than do the "right to life" for the unborn and the "right to decency." If we get involved by taking action for what is right, then we have a real possibility of suffering for righteousness sake. Peter's advice was to count it a blessing and not be afraid. He was speaking from his own experience. He and John had been arrested for healing a lame man. He had been thrown in jail at other time, and he would eventually be killed for his belief in Christ.

I can see evidence that such things as immorality, drugs, perverted life styles, foul language, and a host of like things are glorified in our literature and the entertainment media. We have become as the frog that sit in water that is gradually heated until the water becomes so hot that the frog dies. We have been lulled into complacency so that we fail to see the wrongness of the way of the world. It is almost as if our society has been given over to a reprobate mind.

What's a Christian to do? "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," was Peter's advice. Set apart the Lord as the Number 1 priority, putting Him in the place of rulership. This what it means to have Jesus as Lord of your life. This will change the way you act in the world and others will see a difference. If they can see a difference, then they are likely to ask why. It is important that we tell others in such a way that it draws them to Jesus rather than drives them away. We are to tell them in meekness and and in reverence. Meekness will reflect the attitude we have toward others and reverence is the attitude we should have toward God.

Our life-style such be one that is true to God regardless of what the world does. We know in our own hearts whether what we do is right or not. If you are doing what is right and suffer

persecution for that, then we can take comfort in knowing that Christ also suffered for being and doing right. Just as God used His suffering for great good, so also He can use our suffering for good.

I PETER 4:1-2 We are to approach physical suffering that is associated with persecution for doing what is right in the same manner that Jesus did. We are to "arm our selves with the mind of Christ." Paul advised "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." The mind of Christ is to do the will of God regardless of the consequences. If it meant death on a Roman cross, then that is what He would do. If we are willing to do God's will regardless of what physical pain we may suffer for it, then we will not have any problem with sin in our lives.

We don't normally think about our body controlling us, but this is the case for some people. Some are driven by physical desires and as such find themselves given over to gluttony, alcoholism, use of drugs, laziness, and even sexual misconduct. God did not intend for us to be controlled by such things. We are to be controlled by our spirit which has been born of the Spirit of God.

I PETER 4:7-9 Peter had warned his readers about the judgement that is coming upon people who are worldly minded and participate in evil practices. As Christians we are not to be part of that system. The time of judgement is always near. The world may not end in the next 100 years, but we can be pretty sure that any influence that we will have on where we spend eternity will be over with and done in that period of time. Because we have only a limited amount of time in this life we should not waste it in what Peter refers to dissipation (amusement). We instead should be clear minded or sober and aware of what is happening around us so that we will be able to have Godly influence on the world through our prayers. We have so little time, we should use every opportunity to show love to others and to help each other rather than finding fault with each other. If we truly have love for each other, then we will share what we have and do so with joy rather than resentment.

I PETER 4:10-11 All of us do not have the same gift of ministry from God. It takes everyone doing his or her part to make each other complete. We understand this concept in business to a much greater extent than we do in the church. In business people have assigned jobs and duties so that all parts of the job gets done. In the church, we seem to be unclear what each person's job is or what the entire unit is trying to accomplish.

We find people in the church that speak their opinion on various issues. You'll hear them say, "I think this about the matter." What we should be saying is something like this: "Regardless of how I feel about this issue, this is what the Word of God says on the subject." We should be speaking as the "oracles" of God. In the church today, most of what is being done is done in human strength. We either never knew or have forgotten how to do what we do in the strength of the Lord. Many of the professional preachers in pulpits in our churches are preaching something they have found in a psychology book or they are reciting history lessons with no spiritual content and the people in the congregations are starving to death spiritually. Consequently, there is little praise being raised to Jesus who suffered and died that we might live to His glory.